

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Voluntary - Public

Date: 12/2/2009

GAIN Report Number: SW9017

Sweden

Post: Stockholm

ANIMAL WELFARE PROBLEMS IN SWEDISH PIG PRODUCTION

Report Categories:

Livestock and Products

Approved By:

Stephen Huete

Prepared By:

Asa Widebäck

Report Highlights:

The Swedish pig sector is currently shaken by a set of film clips revealing severe deficiencies in animal care at Swedish pig farms. The creator of the films is a group of animal rights activists that wants to shatter the myth that Swedish pigs are happier than pigs in other countries. In addition to a lot of media attention, the films have also led to stricter controls of pig farms in Sweden.

General Information:

Just in time for the Christmas ham season, the Swedish pig industry is facing one of its toughest crisis in years. A group of animal rights activists has, probably not coincidentally, chosen this time of year to reveal the results of a two-year investigation of Swedish pig farming. The group, called Djurrättsalliansen (the Animal Rights Alliance), has without permission filmed the inside of 100 Swedish pig farms. The group claims that it found severe infringements of Swedish animal rights laws at more or less all the farms. Among the deficiencies found were lack of straw, bad air, wounds on pigs and other injuries. As a result of these findings, the group has reported 90 of these 100 farms to the police for neglect.

These films have created massive media attention, especially as one of the farms that showed the biggest deficiencies is owned by the President of Swedish Meat, a farmer-owned branch organization for Swedish meat producers. At the President's farm, dead pigs had not been removed and were eaten on by other pigs. He has now decided to leave his post.

The aim of the investigation was, according to Djurrättsalliansen, to shatter the myth that Swedish pigs are happier than pigs in other countries. High animal welfare standards are a part of the "Swedish model" of food production. The Swedish model is a concept used by Swedish farmers in marketing their products. It stands for good quality food produced in a sustainable and ethical way.

Animal welfare is also a priority issue for the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture. Within the EU, Sweden considers itself to be at the forefront on animal welfare and has been one of the driving forces behind the development of more stringent EU legislation. The Swedish Agricultural Minister, Eskil Erlandsson, was deeply touched and upset by the films. On November 30, a week after the films were released, he convened a meeting with government and industry representatives. It was agreed at the meeting to implement an animal protection declaration system for pig farms early next year. Declarations will be made in conjunction with the regularly veterinarian visits, which take place about every fifth week. Deficiencies shall be reported to local authorities.

At this point, it is hard to predict how much this scandal will affect sales of pig meat at season's peak, and in the long run. In an attempt to keep consumers' confidence, several slaughter houses have decided to stop deliveries from the farms that were reported to the police. In addition, the pig industry has agreed to implement a certification system for pig farms. Each farm that joins the system needs to fulfill certain animal welfare and food safety requirements. An independent party will handle the controls and certifications of the farms.